

Biblical Theology of God's Mission

The Missionary God Who Sends Us

Introduction

- What made Christianity a “missionary” faith from the very beginning?
- What made early Christians so passionate, courageous, and committed to telling about Jesus?
- Was it really about obedience to Christ’s Great Commission?
- The Jews knew the OT and understood Jesus as the fulfillment of OT promises
- ⁴⁴ He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures (Lu 24:44-45)
- The central narrative of the Bible is about the **gospel**—the good news of God’s offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Messiah of the nation of Israel

Mission in the OT?

- Thus, the **mission of God** “is the story of how God in his sovereign love has purposed to bring the sinful world of his fallen creation to the redeemed world of his new creation. God’s mission is what spans the gap between the curse on the earth of Genesis 3 and the end of the curse in the new creation of Revelation 22” (Wright 2010, 46)
- Most Christians connect mission to Christ’s Great Commission
- Is there mission in the OT?
- Not in the sense of the NT, where people are sent to do evangelism

Mission in the OT?

- The OT sense of mission is God calling his people to be his “**priestly**” representatives, to be distinctly holy, to model God’s instructions, and to be a light to the nations (Ex 19:5-6):
- ⁵ “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”
- ⁹ “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pt 2:9)

Mission in the OT?

- ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the **way of the LORD** by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him” (Gen 18:19)
- The logic of 18:19 is as follows: **election** (God chose Abraham), **ethics** (Abraham and his descendants would keep the way of the Lord), and **mission** (so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him)
- Wright argues that Gen 18:19 is linked to Christian discipleship:
- “According to Gen 18:19, the ethical quality of the life of the people of God is the vital link between their calling and their mission. God’s intention to bless the nations is inseparable from God’s ethical demand on the people he has created to be the agent of that blessing. There is no biblical mission without biblical ethics” (Wright 2010, 94)

Creation and Fall

- God's mission is grounded in creation because he created humanity in his image and placed the first man and woman in the garden, charging them to populate the earth and to manage it for him
- When Adam and Eve sinned, God's redemptive mission was revealed to overcome evil, when promised that Eve's offspring would overcome the curse (Gen 3:15):
- "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."
- The hope of salvation and restoration rested on God's faithfulness to his promise

The Call of Abraham

- God's remedy to the problem of sin was to call Abraham so that all the peoples of the earth would be blessed through him and his descendants (Gen 12:1-3):
- The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. ² "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
- God entered into an unconditional covenant with Abraham based on faith and had universal implications (cf. Gen 15:1-18; Rom 4:16-17; Gal 3:6-9)

The Call of Abraham

- ⁶ So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” ⁷ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. ⁸ Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” ⁹ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Gal 3:6-9)
- ²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal 3:26-29)
- God’s covenant with Abraham is the framework for his dealings with humans throughout redemptive history, culminating in the new covenant instituted by Abraham’s ultimate offspring, the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 3:16)

Jonah a Negative Example

- During the period of the divided kingdom, the prophet Jonah went reluctantly to preach to the people of Nineveh
- Rather than representing a model missionary, he served as an example of Israel's lack of concern for the spiritual well-being of other nations

The Arrival of the Messiah

- All four gospels present Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfilment of OT messianic promises
- Matthew casts Jesus as the son of Abraham and David (Matt 1:1) and as Immanuel, “God with us” (Matt 1:23)
- The gospels agree that Jesus limited the scope of his mission to Israel while occasionally ministering to Gentiles
- But the people of Israel rejected Jesus’ claim to be their Messiah, leading to crucifixion
- Jesus predicted a worldwide extension of his ministry, instructing his disciples that the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations before the end will come (Matt 24:14):

The Arrival of the Messiah

- ¹⁴ “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”
- After his resurrection, Jesus charged his followers to go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations (Matt 28:19-20; Lu 24:46-48):
- ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20)
- ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are **witnesses** of these things” (Lu 24:46-48)

The Early Church and Paul

- The book of Acts opens with the statement from Jesus that the Holy Spirit will empower them to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8):
- ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my **witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
- After Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9), the book of Acts narrates how the early church went about its mission
- The contents of Acts basically follows the expansion of the early church from Jerusalem and Judea, and then also in Samaria and all the way to the ends of the earth

The Early Church and Paul

- The book of Acts notes is a major paradigm shift
- In OT Israel, God's people were to display their faith in God and to attract outsiders to Yahweh by their ethical qualities—to follow in the way of the Lord
- With the possible exception of Jonah, Israel and Second Temple Judaism could not be considered a missionary religion
- Beginning in Acts, God's people were to reach out to unbelievers everywhere

The Early Church and Paul

- Key events in the history of the early church include:
- Peter's Pentecost sermon, with 3 thousand converted (Acts 2)
- As persecution spread 5 thousand were converted (Acts 5)
- The word of God kept spreading (Acts 6)
- Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7), precipitating greater persecution and diaspora of the church (Acts 8)
- Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus and his call to reach the Gentiles (Act 9)
- Peter's vision prompting his mission to Cornelius, the first Gentile convert (Acts 10)
- Paul and Barnabas' mission from Antioch to the Gentiles (Acts 13)
- The Jerusalem Council signalled the full acceptance of Gentiles (Acts 15)

The Early Church and Paul

- In its outreach to Gentiles, the early church actively moved to fulfil God's promise to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) and to obey Christ's Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20)
- The major theme of the book of Acts is the invincible power of God, such that nothing could hinder the progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, the empire's capital (Acts 28:31)
- Paul eventually realized that if Jesus was the crucified and exalted Messiah, the divine curse fell on Jesus for the sake of others in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus (Gal 3:13-14):

The Early Church and Paul

- ¹³ “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.” ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”
- God entrusted Paul with God’s “**mystery**,” the end-time revelation that now Jews and Gentiles alike are gathered together into one body, the church (Rom 16:25-26; Eph 2:1-3:13)
- While Paul’s ministry was directed primarily to Gentiles, he taught that a future remains for ethnic Israel in God’s redemptive purposes (Rom 9-11)

Conclusion

- If God has a mission, what is the mission of God's people?
- Some people think that "mission" is just about sending missionaries overseas. Indeed, some people are called to be missionaries in the sense that they are sent overseas. It is a part of the responsibility of the church, but it is not the whole of what mission is.
- In another sense, all Christians are missionaries, because we are called to live for Christ and to bear "witness" to Christ wherever we are.
- Mission, in terms of the OT and NT, is holistic in nature. We must not separate evangelism and social ethics in our approach to doing mission
- However, as the church engages social concerns, we must emphasize on the ultimacy of evangelism in all our mission efforts

Discipleship Pointers

- How can we promote mission?
- Pray for missionaries
- Pray for an unreached nation
- Give to support missionaries
- Join S-T term mission trips
- Read missionary biographies